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ABSTRACT

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 required a complete restructuring of the educational system and greater emphasis on professional development focused on the needs of teachers at local schools. The purposes of this study were to determine the extent to which schools across the Commonwealth were implementing School-Based Professional Development (SBPD); to explore the status of school-based professional development; to analyze the implementation patterns of school-based professional development; to report the perceptions of professionals toward their school and individual professional development plans; and to provide recommendations regarding successful patterns of implementation of SBPD. The study participants included 44 schools, three elementary, one middle, and two high schools from each of the eight regions of the state. Data were collected by trained observers using the Innovative Component Configuration Map for School-Based Professional Development and structured interviews. The data revealed that nearly all schools reported the development and implementation of annual professional development plans and support structures for professional development. High implementers of professional development options differed from low implementers in the use of mentoring, using new practices, time available during school day, recognition of expertise, local networks for learning and implementing new strategies, and individual professional growth plans. Finally, teachers had more input at the local school level, and financial support for professional development had increased. Among suggested recommendations were the following: (1) professional development plans should include a mission statement to help school personnel focus their goals, as well as activities such as mentoring, time during the school day, reflection, collaboration, and action research; and (2) the concept of what constitutes professional development should be expanded. Suggestions for further research are included. (ND)

Professional Development

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Research Report on the Implementation of
Professional Development in Kentucky
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Running Head: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENTUCKY

Introduction

The School-Based Professional Development study described in this report is part of a larger initiative sponsored in 1995 by the Kentucky Institute for Education Research (KIER) involving six implementation studies of the key Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) programs: (a) Use of Performance Assessments for Instruction, (b) School-Based Decision Making, (c) High School Restructuring, (d) Primary Program, (e) Educational Technology, and (f) School-Based Professional Development. The common purposes shared by these studies is threefold: (a) to determine the extent different program components are being implemented statewide, (b) to identify the most promising patterns of implementation, and (c) to investigate the applicability of using an innovation configuration mapping procedure to depict the status of implementation for the KERA programs. The use and refinement of an innovation configuration mapping procedure should provide a way to study the implementation of KERA programs using a common format of inquiry rather than using several different methodologies that offer few possibilities of comparing implementation status across program areas. These implementation studies share a common format of conceptual design and are intended to provide a basis for future studies of a similar nature.

The Purpose of the Study

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 required a complete restructuring of the Kentucky educational system in the areas of finance, governance, and curriculum. This called for a much greater emphasis on professional development focused on the needs of teachers at local schools. As a result, the purpose of this study was to: (a) determine the extent to

which schools across the Commonwealth were implementing School-Based Professional Development, (b) explore the status of school-based professional development using a behaviorally anchored instrument that identified patterns of implementation with respect to six components of professional development, (c) analyze the implementation patterns of school-based professional development in 48 randomly selected schools, (d) report the perceptions of professionals toward their school and individual professional development plans, and (e) provide recommendations regarding successful patterns of implementation of School-Based Professional Development.

The Sample

Forty-eight schools were randomly selected for the study: three elementary, one middle, and two high schools from each of the eight regions. In each school six people were interviewed: (a) the principal, (b) two professional development committee members, and (c) three non professional development committee members. Of the 48 schools selected for the study, four were unable to be included due to scheduling conflicts. Several schools decided not to participate, but other schools were randomly selected and their administrators agreed to participate. While the study sample is small and may not be entirely representative of school-based professional development throughout the state, it is the most extensive effort to date to collect statewide data on the implementation of school-based professional development.

The Data Collection Process

Information about the implementation of specific components of school-based professional development was collected by trained observers using the Innovative Component

Configuration Map for School-Based Professional Development (SBPD Map). The SBPD Map contained behaviorally anchored descriptions of different levels of implementation for 24 sub-components of the six statewide adopted attributes of School-Based Professional Development. This research instrument provided an objective means for an observer/researcher to identify the variations of practice relative to the KERA ideal. Field observers across the state were recruited and trained from the ranks of university professors and doctoral students in education. Researchers used audiotaped interviews to train field observers and to develop inter-observer agreement.

Data collected for analysis consisted of completed Innovation Component Configuration Map for School-Based Professional Development and notes from structured interviews with the teachers and principal in each school.

Conclusions Based on Analysis of Data and Observations

1. Based on an analysis of 24 professional development components, the 44 schools in the study sample demonstrated a wide range in the extent of implementation of desired professional development practices. However, nearly all schools reported the development and implementation of annual school professional development plans, had support structures for professional development, and provided traditional conferences and workshops.
2. High implementors of professional development options differ from low implementors in the use of: (a) mentoring to provide transfer of skills from teacher to teacher, (b) action research to try out new practices, (c) professional development activities within the school day, (d) systematic recognition of local school expertise to conduct professional development

activities, (e) local networks for learning and implementing new strategies, and (f) individual professional growth plans as an integral part of the school's annual professional development program.

- About one-third (32 percent) of schools identified as high implementors used mentoring or coaching to transfer new skills. Low implementors almost never included mentoring or coaching in their programs.
- About half of the high implementor schools reported they used action research to experiment and refine new practices on a regular basis whereas a majority of all schools studied said they did not use action research.
- More than half (52%) of the schools studied do not offer support for professional development within the school day. Thirty percent of the schools are providing on-site support that gives teachers a reduced workload and/or the opportunity for professional development at least monthly within the school day. Sixteen percent provide this on-site support once or twice a semester.
- Over half of the high implementors are using teachers as team leaders or coordinators of program areas to build local school capacity for professional development. While most schools report that local expertise exists, it is not systematically recognized and developed.
- Almost half (44%) of the schools sampled indicated that their local learning networks use existing and/or are developing new ones to share implementation strategies on a regular basis; 34% of schools indicated this was not available.

- Over half of the high implementors have teachers develop individual professional growth plans that integrate school goals and their professional career goals as part of a formal school process.
3. A majority of schools, 77% of schools sampled in this study, have annual professional development plans developed through collaboration with school staff; however, the majority of schools (57%) do not have clear mission statements or a set of beliefs about professional development. Field observers noted that a mission statement was not a requirement for the 1993-94 Annual School Professional Development Plan.
 4. A majority of staff, 79% of schools sampled in this study, have developed some type of individual professional growth plans but only 18% stated their individual plans were integrated with the school goals and their professional career goals.
 5. There is a wide range in the availability of professional development options from school to school. While a majority of schools have a variety of options, at least one-third of the staff interviewed reported limited professional development opportunities.
 6. Professional development still takes place mostly on professional development days. Less than one school in three visited reported ongoing year-round availability of professional development options.
 7. Approximately one in four of the schools sampled has implemented some type of flexible scheduling to facilitate teacher collaboration in curriculum planning and professional development. Middle schools are clearly the leaders in implementing such a practice.
 8. Professionals in half of the schools studied indicated that evaluation data on professional

development activities collected were not used.

9. There is an increase in the practice of bringing educators within schools together on a regular basis (at least monthly) to explore and develop solutions to persistent problems and school needs. Some type of regular school-based problem solving was reported by 80 percent of high schools, 62 percent of elementary, and 50 percent of middle schools.

10. Many teachers are spending more than the required days mandated by their school/district. Also, teachers are engaged in activities that develop them professionally but which are not formally acknowledged as "professional development" activities. (For example, taking university courses, observing teachers in other classrooms, attending conferences, and mentoring others.)

11. While the principal was observed to be the primary leader for professional development, teachers now have more input at the local school level and as a consequence professional development has become more relevant to what teachers perceive they need.

12. Money available to support professional development (conference registration, mileage, paid substitutes) is expanding the options available to teachers. Although professional development is improved, there is a need for (a) additional funding, (b) more time in the school day for teachers to collaborate, (c) and access to more quality professional opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Annual professional development plans need to include a mission statement or a set of beliefs about professional development to help school personnel focus their goals for the

school and for personnel to keep their individual professional growth plans aligned with the school professional development plan.

2. Schools and practitioners need to expand their concepts of what constitutes professional development.
3. The school annual professional development plan should include a method of providing follow-up or on-going experiences such as mentoring, reflection, collaboration and action research. In-depth development should be targeted so practitioners are able to become experts.
4. School annual professional development plans should attempt to build capacity within the school, recognize the expertise of faculty that does exist, and systematically plan to develop expertise in identified areas.
5. Individual growth plans need to integrate both the school goals and the individual's professional career goals.
6. Technology should be used more extensively to expand opportunities for professional development.
7. Time during the school day needs to be allotted for professional development to include such things as collaboration with other teachers, reflection on teaching strategies, flexible scheduling of the school day, and on-site support.
8. Schools should continue to convene groups of educators to discuss and implement best practices into the school.
10. Since the principal is the primary leader for professional development, he/she needs to

collaborate more with professional development committee members and school personnel.

11. Additional funding needs to be applied to professional development.

12. Evaluation of professional development needs to be an on-going process to measure the immediate and long-term impact of professional development on teaching and learning and to plan for the future.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. In-depth case studies should be conducted in those schools that have a high implementation rate of innovative professional development practices. A more complete description of these schools would help to promote an understanding of what is necessary to implement successful professional development practices.
2. A replication of this study should be conducted using a different sample and a revised Innovation Component Configuration Map for School-Based Professional Development.
3. A trend study should be conducted every few years and patterns of growth should be analyzed. While professional development has improved since 1990, it must be monitored for continued growth; professional development must continually be developing.